

Status of Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* and Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *C. beaudouini* in The Gambia

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Le statut du Circaète Jean-le-Blanc *Circaetus gallicus* et du Circaète de Beaudouin *C. beaudouini* en Gambie. Du fait que le Circaète Jean-le-Blanc *Circaetus gallicus* et le Circaète de Beaudouin *C. beaudouini* sont souvent considérés comme conspécifiques, leur statut respectif en Gambie reste à préciser. De l'analyse de plus de 50 observations de circaètes effectuées pendant les trois dernières années dans le pays, ainsi que de quelques autres mentions, il apparaît que le Circaète de Beaudouin peut être observé durant toute l'année (mais aucun nid n'a encore été trouvé), tandis que le Circaète Jean-le-Blanc semble rare. Les auteurs invitent les observateurs à leur faire parvenir toute observation relative à ces deux espèces.

Standard works^{3,8} on bird status and distribution in West Africa, including The Gambia¹, have not distinguished between Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* and Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *C. beaudouini*. Others^{2,12} treat them as species, indicate the difficulties in separating them, and list the status of Short-toed Eagle in The Gambia as rare. Del Hoyo *et al.*⁷ also recognised them as different species, but depicted them as both occurring in The Gambia, whereas Ferguson-Lees & Christie⁹ show the range of Beaudouin's Snake Eagle as including The Gambia, but that of Short-toed Eagle to be north and east of, but not within, The Gambia.

Clark⁵ presented arguments for species status for the two (as well as for Black-chested Snake Eagle *C. pectoralis*), and he recently enumerated field marks that permit field workers to separate adult Beaudouin's Snake Eagles from all Short-toed Snake Eagles, and the all-brown juvenile plumage of Beaudouin's Snake Eagle from Brown Snake Eagle *C. cinereus*⁴.

For the past three years we, especially CB, have been noting the identification features of all of the more than 50 snake eagles of these two species seen in The Gambia, including studying more than 15 photos taken by WSC and others. We have identified more than 40 adult and two juvenile Beaudouin's Snake Eagles, but not a single Short-toed Eagle.

Adult Beaudouin's Snake Eagles have been seen throughout the year in The Gambia (although no nests have been found). One juvenile was seen and a distant photograph taken by WSC in early January, in the Lower River Division. The other

juvenile was observed by CB and photographed by John Ovenden, on 23 April 2002, in extensive rice fields at Jakally-Pacharr, Central River Division (13°13'N 14°58'W). A possible reason why so few juveniles are recorded is that they are being misidentified as Brown Snake Eagles (see Figs 1–4 for field marks to distinguish them).

Nik Borrow (pers comm) has recorded only two Short-toed Snake Eagles in The Gambia during short visits over the past eight years, one in January at Basse and the other in November at Kotu, and at least six adult Beaudouin's Snake Eagles.

Meyburg *et al.*^{10,11} have reported on two Short-toed Snake Eagles, one juvenile and one adult, that were tracked with satellite transmitters from western France into Africa on their autumn migration. Both individuals spent the northern winter in northern Niger, far to the east of The Gambia. It is possible that most Short-toed Snake Eagles from Europe follow a direct, due south route to their savanna winter grounds, which are mainly north and east of The Gambia, in Mauritania and northern Senegal.

We believe that Short-toed Snake Eagle is rare in The Gambia, compared to the frequently encountered Beaudouin's Snake Eagle. We welcome future reports of either of these species in The Gambia; please include field marks used for identification or, better still, photographs.

Clark^{5–6} and other recent authorities^{7,9} prefer 'Short-toed Snake Eagle' as the English name for *C. gallicus*, for consistency, as the other five members of this genus are all known as 'snake eagles'.

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Captions to plate on page 29

- Figure 1. Juvenile Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini*, The Gambia, April (John Ovenden). Body and underwing-coverts brown, except the greater coverts, which are pale. Wings show extensive dark tips; secondaries are faintly barred and pale undertail shows faint narrow dark bands. Circaète de Beaudouin *Circaetus beaudouini*, juvénile, Gambie, avril (John Ovenden). Corps et couvertures sous-alaires bruns, sauf les grandes couvertures, qui sont pâles. Le bout des ailes est largement bordé de sombre; les rémiges secondaires sont faiblement barrées et le dessous de la queue est pâle, vaguement et finement barré de sombre.
- Figure 2. Juvenile Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini*, The Gambia, April (John Ovenden). From above, pale wing-coverts contrast with darker flight feathers and uppertail has faint darker narrow bands. Circaète de Beaudouin *Circaetus beaudouini*, juvénile, Gambie, avril (John Ovenden). Dessus: couvertures alaires pâles contrastant avec les rémiges plus sombres; queue vaguement et finement barrée de sombre.
- Figure 3. Brown Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinereus*, Kenya, June (W. S. Clark). Similar to juvenile Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *C. beaudouini*, but dark on wingtips is narrow, secondaries are unbarred and dark tail has narrow whitish bands. Circaète brun *Circaetus cinereus*, Kenya, juin (W. S. Clark). Ressemble au Circaète de Beaudouin *C. beaudouini* juvénile, mais le bout des ailes n'est qu'étroitement bordé de sombre, les rémiges secondaires ne sont pas barrées et la queue est foncée avec d'étroites barres blanchâtres.
- Figure 4. Brown Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinereus*, The Gambia, March (W. S. Clark). Uppersides of wings uniformly dark and dark uppertail has narrow whitish bands. Circaète brun *Circaetus cinereus*, Gambie, mars (W. S. Clark). Le dessus des ailes est uniformément foncé et le dessus de la queue est foncé avec d'étroites barres blanchâtres.
- Figure 5. Juvenile Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini*, Kenya, January (W. S. Clark). Circaète de Beaudouin *Circaetus beaudouini*, juvénile, Kenya, janvier (W. S. Clark).



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